

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
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I'm still asked on a regular basis about my switch to Verizon FIOS. And I promised an update after a few months, and I guess a few months have passed. So here you go!

As you may recall, I signed up for phone, internet and television service with Verizon after many years with Comcast. My initial perception of the Verizon package was that it was a good one. Nothing has changed in that regard. I continue to enjoy the variety of programming that they offer although it's tough to remember the new channels since they are different from Comcast. Maybe that's just a function of age! (Mine!) In addition, I haven't yet seen the Verizon channel lineups in local papers, possibly because their service is only provided in limited areas.

The HD picture continues to be good and the picture quality on non-HD TVs is much better than I expected. Phone service is sort of a nonentity because I had Verizon phone service previously. The internet speed is very fast; although, as I mentioned previously, my computer is growing long in the tooth, so the speed may be even faster with newer models.

Many folks told me stories of billing issues with Verizon. I have not experienced that. The first bill can be overwhelming, especially since it's prorated, but their customer service agents should be able to walk you through it. Here's a little secret on dealing with the bill: have it sent online, pay it automatically, and most times you'll tend to forget about it. Probably not good financial advice but you won't have the aggravation that way!

A couple of minor irritations that I've noticed are that when you change channels from HD to regular channels and vice versa, there is a two-second delay; it's not instantaneous. Verizon reps, to their credit, warned me about that upfront, so it wasn't unexpected but annoying nonetheless. The other small complaint I have is that I ordered Verizon's virus/spyware software rather than buy my own. Comcast's was a free product as you'll remember. The cost of Verizon's product was minimal and that's not my issue. It seems to have a mind of its own when it decides to do scans. I've tried to set it up to scan at night while I'm sleeping and inevitably it simply starts scanning whenever it wants. That has the effect of slowing down my old computer even more. I'll keep working with it however.

A much larger concern for me has surfaced recently concerning Verizon. They're selling their phone lines in 13 states, including Washington, to a company called Frontier Communications in a \$5 billion deal. And phone lines provide internet and FIOS service to our homes. What will that mean for Verizon subscribers?

On the surface, nothing, for the time being. Verizon did the same thing in three states last year to a different company. The early reviews on that deal have been less than glowing. An earlier deal in Hawaii has sent the buyer into bankruptcy. Frontier says they are a better company and can handle the purchase. Time will tell. A Frontier spokesman remarked that "getting these FIOS markets is going to be terrific for Frontier because it allows us to understand video delivery." I would prefer a company that already knows how to deliver that service rather than be their guinea pig.

The deal still has to be approved by state and federal regulators so there are many hurdles to jump before the deal can close. Frontier is still bound by city franchise agreements that dictate complete FIOS build-outs in cities, like Edmonds, where the service hasn't been completely installed yet. So the takeover, if approved, should be business as usual.

Knowing all of that, I still believe in fiber as the future of communications and would still recommend the FIOS product. But the potential sale gives me pause.